

VI. SOCIAL ORGANIZATION

THE FAMILY

594 The Tanala family consists of a man, his wife or wives and their children. Among the Menabe the father is, in theory, the absolute head of the family with authority over the persons and property of not only his own children but his sons' children as well. Actually his authority varies with his personality and I even found a few cases in which fathers had been deserted by their children and reduced to want. Sons are not considered heads of families until after their father's death. Among the Ikongo authority over the children seems to be vested in the mother, while control of the family property is vested in the father. Such a condition might easily arise in a group which was in transition from a matriarchal system with communal ownership to a patriarchal one with individual ownership. In both groups the whole family, including married sons, normally lives together in part of the ward belonging to their lineage (see The Village).

592 Although no exact figures are available, at least two-thirds of
595 the Menabe families seem to be monogamous. Polygyny is common, but is only possible to a man with some wealth and social prestige. Among the Ikongo, polygyny is somewhat commoner, but by no means universal. In both cases each wife has her own house, built by the husband at the time of their marriage. In all but two or three of the Menabe groups the husband must spend one day with each wife, in regular rotation. On that day he assists her and sleeps in her house. If he stays with one wife on another's day, the injured wife is entitled to divorce with alimony (see Divorce). She usually waives this, but the husband must make her a public apology and a substantial present. Among the Ikongo, who hold land individually, each wife is assigned a share of the husband's land. He has to help her to cultivate this on her day, while she feeds herself, her children, and the husband while with her, from its produce. The first wife is called the *Vady Be*, the second *Vady Ivo*, and the third *Vady Mampy*. There is no special term for additional wives and a man rarely has more than three. The *Vady Be*, who is always the first wife married, is superior to the others socially and helps the husband to administer the family finances. Often she holds the family purse for current expenses and the others, including the husband, have to apply to her for money. Wives pride themselves on economy and good manage-

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ment and money is never disbursed without a long argument. The ⁵⁹⁵ husband keeps most of his belongings in the Vady Be's house and ⁵⁹² considers it his real home.

In spite of the separate housing for the wives and married sons, the Tanala family is well integrated. It is customary for the entire group to eat together in the house where the father is on that day and cooking is done in rotation. The wives aid each other in all their activities, look after each other's children, etc. There can be no doubt that polygyny does a great deal to lighten the labor of the women and they are quite as much in favor of it as the men.

The family is normally patrilineal, but among the Menebe a ⁵⁹¹ strong and rich family may insist that their women continue to live ⁽⁵⁹⁶⁾ with them after marriage. In this case the husband comes to the wife's village or ward in the village, builds the new house there, and assists the men of her lineage in working their common land. Widows with children continue to live with their husband's family or lineage and if they remarry the new husband is usually compelled to come and live with them. This is to safeguard the children, who might otherwise be slighted or abused by their stepfather. Under the matrilineal arrangement the father has little authority in the family and the children feel more closely bound to their mother's lineage than to their father's. It is considered rather disgraceful for a man to consent to live with his wife's kin and ordinarily only one who is poor or of little account will do so.

THE LINEAGE

I have chosen this term to designate a relationship group which ⁵⁹⁶ is very important in Tanala social and economic life. It is intermediate between the family proper and the larger units of village and gens. The lineage is composed of the recent descendants of one man and his wife or wives, tracing in the male line. Attached to it, but not altogether a part of it, are the wives of lineage members, children of lineage women whose marriages have been matrilineal and, in many cases, one or more families of hereditary slaves.

The lineage might be described as either an expanded family or an embryonic gens. The natives themselves take the former view and use the same term for it as for the family, but it is much larger than a family in the European sense, often numbering as many as seventy-five to one hundred persons. At the same time, it differs from a true gens in the closer blood relationship existing between members, its closer social and economic integration and its rather transitory nature.

- 585 After the betrothal the girl continues to live with her parents, sometimes for as much as two months. The period is not fixed and in the Zafimaniry gens her relatives try to prolong it as much as possible. The boy visits her and sleeps with her. She spends her time in making her part of the equipment for the new house: mats, baskets, and a raffia mosquito net and pillows. The boy prepares the house and his share of the equipment. On an auspicious day a number of the boy's relatives go to get the girl. The two families usually agree on the number in advance, so that each will know how many people they will have to feast. The girl's family feasts the delegation at her house. An equal number of her relatives then accompany her to the boy's house, where they are feasted in turn. After the feast, all her relatives go home. The young people live with the groom's father for a week, then go to their own house. Among the Zafimaniry the bride, on entering the house of her parents-in-law for the first time, presents them with her best mat and receives their thanks and blessing.
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The ceremonies are the same for plural as for first marriages, but are usually somewhat less elaborate, with smaller feasts. The same holds for remarriages of widows or divorced women.

PLURAL MARRIAGES

- 537 Polyandry is mentioned in some Tanala legends, but it is interwoven with other fabulous details and there is no reason to believe that it ever existed as a recognized institution. In making the *seifanapana* ("blood brotherhood") pact, men often agree to hold their wives in common, but they rarely if ever do this when they live in the same village. The community of wives, therefore, resolves itself into reciprocal sexual hospitality. This is operative even during the absence of the husband.

- 595 Polygyny is still common. Under the old regime there was no limit to the number of wives the king might have. The last king of Ambohimanga had thirty-three. Other men are limited to four but rarely take the full quota. The number depends on their wealth and personal desirability.

It is permissible for a man to marry sisters as plural wives, but there is some feeling against it and it is rare. It is believed that sisters will be more jealous of each other than wives who come from different families. The Zafindriantrova gens has prohibited the practice in recent years, due to one sister having poisoned another who was a fellow wife.